

MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE

DISCIPLINE EQUALS FREEDOM, WEEK 8

I. OUR CALL TO DISCIPLINE

Proverbs 16:32

II. OUR MODEL FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

III. MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE EXPLAINED

Meditating on Scripture is focused thinking about a passage in order to fully absorb and apply its truths into our lives. One author puts it like this: “Let’s define *meditation* as deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture, or upon life from a scriptural perspective, for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer” (Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 46-47).

“The Bible uses two Hebrew words ... to convey the idea of meditation, and together they are used some fifty-eight times. These words have various meanings: listening to God’s word, reflecting on God’s works, rehearsing God’s deeds, ruminating on God’s law, and more. In each case there is stress upon changed behavior as a result of our encounter with the living God” (Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 15).

“Whereas the study of Scripture centers on exegesis, the meditation of Scripture centers on internalizing and personalizing the passage. The written Word becomes a living word addressed to you. This is not a time for technical studies, or analysis, or even the gathering of material to share with others.... Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, ‘...**just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart, as Mary did. That is all. That is meditation**’” (Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 29).

“The failure to linger is the reason why many fail to remember or find their hearts warmed by the fire of God’s Word. It takes their eyes about two seconds to go past the fire of verse one in the chapter they are reading for the day. Then it takes their eyes two seconds or so to read over verse two. And then another two seconds as their eyes go past verse three, and so on until they’ve finished reading. It doesn’t matter how many of those two-second episodes you have; you will rarely remember or be moved by something you look at for two seconds. **Thus the problem is probably not your memory or the coldness of your heart, but your method. So why don’t you remember what you read in the Bible? Could it be that you simply do not let your mind linger over something you’ve read?** And why does the intake of God’s Word often leave us so cold and seem to produce so little success in our spiritual lives? Puritan pastor Thomas Watson has the answer: ‘The reason we come away so cold from reading the word is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation’” (Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 49-50).

“You may often listen to recorded Bible teaching and Christian music.... You may read the Scriptures almost every day, and possibly other Christian books like this one. As a result you encounter a torrential amount of God’s truth (not to mention the river of all the other information that rushes through your eyes and ears) each week. But without absorbing some of the water of the Word of God you encounter, you will be little better for the contact. Hearing and reading the Bible is the exposure to Scripture—that’s needful, but it’s only the starting place. **After the exposure to Scripture we need to absorb it. Meditation is the absorption of Scripture. And it’s the absorption of Scripture that leads to the experience with God and the transformation of life we long for when we come to the Bible.** Yes, we want to hear and read the Bible—often and much—but without the addition of meditation, warned the great man of prayer and faith George Muller, ‘the simple reading of the Word of God’ can become information that ‘only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe’” (Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 50-51).

IV. MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE IN THE BIBLE

Joshua 1:8

Psalm 1:1-3

Psalm 63:6

Psalm 39:1-6

Psalm 77:12

Psalm 119:97, 148

V. HOW TO MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE (largely adapted from Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 54-69)

- **Select an appropriate passage**
 - *Read Big:* Read a section of the Bible, say a chapter or so. It would be good to try to discern the overall flow of that section and to identify the main thought or theme of the passage.
 - *Meditate Small:* Pick the verse, phrase, or word that jumps out to you and capture your imagination the most within the section you read. If you know you need to meditate on a certain theme (worry, peace, faith, suffering), do a Google search for verses related that theme, and select a passage for meditation.
- **Select One or More Methods of Meditation**
 - **Analytic Methods**
 1. **Rewrite the text in your own words**
Imagine you're sending the meaning to someone else. How would you paraphrase it?
 2. **Formulate a principle from the text—what does it teach?**
This is great for a larger section of text. What is the main point? (What is it talking about, and what is it teaching about what it is talking about?)
 3. **Think of an illustration of the text—what picture explains it?**
This would be a word picture that explains, clarifies, or confirms the object of meditation.
 4. **Look for applications of the text**
The outcome of meditation should life-change. How should you respond to this text? Consider saying "I will not close my Bible until I know at least one thing the Lord wants me to do with this verse."
 5. **Ask how the text points to the Law or the Gospel**
One way to think about the Bible (central in Lutheran thinking) is that the Bible presents us with themes of Law (what God expects of us, that ultimately we cannot fulfill) and Gospel (how God, through Jesus, graciously provides to us what we cannot do).
 6. **Ask how the text points to something about Jesus**
In the Christian understanding, there is a certain sense in which every Scripture ultimately points to Jesus, who is the center of everything (see Luke 24:27). How can you think through this text with Christ as your focus?
 7. **Ask the Philippians 4:8 questions of the text**
What is true about this, or what truth does it exemplify? What is honorable about this? What is just or right about this? What is pure about this, or how does it exemplify purity? What is lovely about this? What is commendable about this? What is excellent about this? What is praiseworthy about this?

8. Ask the Joseph Hall (Anglican bishop, 1574-1656) questions of the text

What is it you are meditating on (*define* it or *describe* it)? What are its *divisions* or *parts*? What *causes* it? What does it *cause*; that is, what are its *fruits* and *effects*? What is its *place*, *location*, or *use*? What are its *qualities* and *attachments*? What is *contrary*, *contradictory*, or *different* to it? What *compares* to it? What are its *titles* or *names*? What are the *testimonies* or *examples* of Scripture about it?

9. Set and discover a minimum number of insights from the text

10? 15? 25? 100?

10. Find a common link or common thread between all the paragraphs or chapters you read

This is especially helpful when reading large sections. Pay extra close attention to paragraphs, since paragraph divisions are more important than verse divisions.

11. Ask how the text speaks to your current issue or question

12. Use mind mapping

This practice is a diagram that organizes information in a more visually appealing way. Look it up online for guidance. For example: <https://simplemind.eu/how-to-mind-map/basics/>

13. Ask what question is answered or what problem is solved by this text

○ **Reflective Methods**

1. Slowly repeat the text as many ways as possible

Repeat it out loud, silently, and thoughtfully. Spend time, accepting it as God’s word to you.

2. Memorize the text

This is a key to be able to continually meditate on the verse throughout the day. You are in no hurry. Why not meditate on the same passage for a day, a week, a month, a year?

To help you with memorizing Scripture verses, consider using the app VerseLocker, or go to their website: www.scripturememory.com

3. Emphasize different words in the text

“I am the resurrection and the life.” “I *am* the resurrection and the life.” “I am *the resurrection* and the life.” “I am the resurrection and *the life*.” Etc.

4. Pray through the text

Example based on Psalm 119:50, “Lord, you know the affliction I’m going through right now. Your Word promises to comfort me in affliction. I really believe that is true. Your Word has revived me in affliction during the past, and I confess my faith to You that it will revive me in this experience. I pray that you will revive me now through the comfort of your Word.”

5. Create an artistic expression of the text

God gives us imagination and artistic skill. Use it!

6. Continue to bring your mind back to text over the entire day, week, or month

Like a cow chewing its cud, keep returning to the passage to extract as much as you can from it. This pairs well with memorization of the passage.

● **Don’t Rush—Take Time!**

Read less, if necessary, to meditate more!

TRAINING PLAN

“That is what I want you to be afraid of: waking up in six days or six weeks or six years or SIXTY YEARS and being no closer to your goal... You have made NO PROGRESS. That is the horror. That is the nightmare. That is what you really need to be afraid of: being stagnant. So. GET UP. AND. GO. Take the risk, take the gamble, take the first step. Take action. And don’t let another day slip by.” —Jocko Willink, *Discipline Equals Freedom*, 41.

Circle the Level of Engagement You Are Committing to This Week

All four are good choices, and you don’t need to pick the same level every week.

First Steps:

- At least 2 days this week, meditate on Scripture for at least 20 minutes using the instructions on pages 2-3. (If you don’t know what to read to get started, pick a chapter out of one of the gospels). After the first day you may choose a new text or remain with the same one. After the last day spend some time thinking through its value for you.

Hit Harder:

- At least 3 days this week, meditate on Scripture for at least 20 minutes using the instructions on pages 2-3. (If you don’t know what to read to get started, pick a chapter out of one of the gospels). After the first day you may choose a new text or remain with the same one. After the last day spend some time thinking through its value for you.
- During this series we will process our experiences in discussion with another person or a small group of people. Sometime this week, meet up with one person discuss your experiences and encourage one another. Consider including people who are not part of our church as well. *Use Discussion Guide Week 8* below to guide your conversation.

Hard Core:

- At least 6 days this week, meditate on Scripture for at least 20 minutes using the instructions on pages 2-3. (If you don’t know what to read to get started, pick a chapter out of one of the gospels). After the first day you may choose a new text or remain with the same one. After the last day spend some time thinking through its value for you.
- During this series we will process our experiences in discussion with another person or a small group of people. Sometime this week, meet up with one person discuss your experiences and encourage one another. Consider including people who are not part of our church as well. *Use Discussion Guide Week 8* below to guide your conversation.

Beast Mode:

- At least 6 days this week, meditate on Scripture for at least 40 minutes using the instructions on pages 2-3. (If you don’t know what to read to get started, pick a chapter out of one of the gospels). After the first day you may choose a new text or remain with the same one. After the last day spend some time thinking through its value for you.
- During this series we will process our experiences in discussion with another person or a small group of people. Sometime this week, meet up with one person discuss your experiences and encourage one another. Consider including people who are not part of our church as well. *Use Discussion Guide Week 8* below to guide your conversation.
- If you commit to Beast Mode, please email, text, or call me so I know about it and can be praying for you. As time allows I will try to reach out to see how it is going. grhodea@grandgrace.org; 469-250-0825.

READING: MEDITATION

Adapted from Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Expanded Edition, 191-93

Desire	To more deeply gaze on God through the written Word and the created order
Definition	Meditation is a long, ardent gaze at God, his work and his Word. Slowing down and giving one's undivided attention to God lies at the core of Christian meditation.
Scripture	<p>"Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." (Joshua 1:8)</p> <p>"If I'm sleepless at midnight, I spend the hours in grateful reflection." (Psalm 63:6 <i>The Message</i>)</p> <p>"I'll ponder all the things you've accomplished, and give a long, loving look at your acts." (Psalm 77:12 <i>The Message</i>)</p> <p>"May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer." (Psalm 19:14)</p>
Practice Includes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading creation as "a most elegant book, wherein, all creatures great and small, are as so many characters leading us to see clearly the invisible things of God" (Belgic Confession) • Mulling over, chewing on and ruminating over God's Word and its application • Meditating on people: seeing them as God sees them and expressing delight in them as he does • Paying attention to God with your body by slowing down, relaxing and breathing deeply • Meditating on Jesus and on Scripture
God-Given Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing sight for the interior things of God in the natural and external world • Seeing beyond a first glance and first impression to the heart of God • Developing depth of insight • Developing a love for gazing on God • Experiencing calmness, serenity and quietness stemming from an awareness of the nearness of God

Meditation

Meditation is not simply a discipline of Eastern religions and New Age gurus. Meditation rests at the core of Judeo-Christian spirituality; it's an invitation to apprehend God. In *The Pursuit of God* A. W. Tozer writes, "God dwells in His creation and is everywhere indivisibly present in all His works." And Psalm 139:7 asserts, "Where can I go from your Spirit? / Where can I flee from your presence?" God is near. In the words of C. S. Lewis in his *Letters to Malcom: Chiefly on Prayer*: "God walks everywhere incognito." Clues to his presence can be found in creation, in history, in human beings, in worship and in Scripture. But we must stop and pay attention. Meditation runs counter to our busy culture, where speed reading, first impression and skimming are as deep as we go. In meditation we gaze at something or someone long and longingly. We seek the treasure and truth of what we see. Just as moving a prism reveals different bands of color, meditation allows God to shine his truth and light into our hearts.

Meditation is not about emptying the mind so there is nothing there. Christian meditation opens us to the mind of God and to his world and presence in the world. As we enter times of meditation, it is important to let go our preoccupations so we can focus our minds and become present to God. Our minds are naturally designed to make associations and follow tangents. Meditation is a way we train the mind to stay put so it can explore appropriate associations. Simple physical exercises like stretching, sitting comfortably and breathing deeply can help us pay attention, listen deeply and even curb our distractibility. These exercise are not an end in themselves. They simply seek to put body, mind and spirit on the same page so we can better pay attention to God and treasure what he reveals.

To meditate on Scripture choose a verse, chapter or book of the Bible. Don't hurry. Listen to the Scripture. Write down your questions. Use your imagination. You may wish to memorize a short part of the text to keep it clearly before you. Like a cow chewing the cud, keep returning to your text with your mind and heart. When you are distracted, gently return to your text. Express once again your desire to pay attention. The impact of meditating on Scripture can show up later in our interactions with others....

To meditate on God's good creation, attend to what God has made. Open yourself to the beauty around you and drink deeply. Let the Spirit move you into praise. Meditation on creation is meant to lead us into the arms of our Creator....

Spiritual Exercises

1. Prepare yourself to meditate on Scripture by choosing a comfortable and quiet place. Do not rush. Stretch, arrange your chair, take off your shoes. Sit in a position that you can maintain without effort or attention. Place yourself in the presence of God. Release your anxieties and to-do list to the Lord. Ask him to open your heart to his Word.
 - Read Psalm 139, Psalm 86, Psalm 42, or another short passage from Scripture.
 - Take your time, and when a word “lights up” for you stop and attend. Let the word or phrase roam around in your mind and heart. What do you hear? What feelings do you notice in yourself? Write down any questions that surface. You can attend to these at another time.
 - When your mind wanders, gently bring it back and continue your meditation. Do not feel you have to finish anything. Take your word with you.
 - Begin again tomorrow with the same passage.
2. Take a walk in nature, meditating on the handiwork of God. The lilies of the field and the birds of the air spoke to Jesus of God’s care (Matthew 6:26-32). How does God speak to you in his creation?
3. Meditate on the news. How is God speaking to you through current events? Is he inviting you to see the world through his eyes in some new way? Is he inviting you into prayer in a new way?
4. Meditate on the great truths of the faith using the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed or a confession of faith. Spend time deeply entering into the words and their meaning. The following is a quote from the Heidelberg Confession of Faith and is a lovely truth for meditation:

Question: What is your only comfort in life and in death?
 Answer: That I belong body and soul, in life and death, not to myself, but to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has freely paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil.
5. Meditate on the work of God in the lives of individuals throughout the ages. Listen to what they can teach you and how they can shape you

Resources on Meditation

The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed

Devotional Classics, by Richard Foster and James Bryan Smith

Meditation and Communion with God: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction by John Jefferson Davis

DISCUSSION GUIDE WEEK 8: MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE

Meet together this week with at least one other person to discuss your experiences. Later in the week would be ideal so you have some time to practice. Meeting in person is best, but over the phone or via video chat would work too.

Before meeting, each person should read pages 5-6 in this handout (or read it together), as well as looking over again pages 1-3. Underline key parts of this reading and write down any questions you might have.

Questions for Your Group

1. Share your experiences this week meditating on Scripture. Discuss also any practice of this discipline you have made use of in the past.
2. Discuss the reading on pages 5-6 of this handout.
3. Take turns reading Psalm 119 together. You don’t have to read the whole thing, just go as far as you like, stopping to discuss where helpful. How does this inform your own desire for God’s Word?
4. Share prayer concerns and pray for one another.